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Though it goes against everything I know and believe, I still enjoy the Olympics, and once the games get under way I put aside all my objections and reservations. I love the Olympic theme music, am excited by the great athletic performances, and even have gotten used to Jim McKay.

Nevertheless, reason has its claims, too, and the modern Olympic Games have little enough to do with what you saw in *Chariots of Fire*. They are corrupt in ways never approached by frankly professional athletics, and the more you care about athletics the deeper the reservations you are bound to have about the Olympics.

The Soviets have been making noises lately about not showing up in Los Angeles. Since a Soviet trio has been aptly defined as a Soviet string quartet traveling abroad, the Soviets understandably are worried about some of their athletes defecting. But the notion that the Soviets will fail to show up is absurd.

For the Soviet Union and the other communist bloc nations, the Olympics are primarily a political event, and they make a large financial investment in Olympic success. Their athletes are state employees, and in most events the beneficiaries of vast state-run training programs. The Soviets are not going to sulk at home while the East Germans and Romanians pick up a lot of gold medals.

To be sure, the Soviets are furious over the American boycott of the 1980 Moscow games, invoked by President Carter as a response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. They were and are furious, not because they had an overwhelming desire to compete against American athletes but because the Moscow games had been conceived as a fast propaganda event in the manner of Hitler's 1936 Olympics. The Moscow games were to be a globally televised celebration of the Soviet state, with NBC-TV obligingly providing the technology to get the message out. Everything was coordinated to

Olympics in a mess but still enjoyable

serve the propaganda purpose, from the clearing of all dissidents out of the Moscow area to the manufacture of those little toy Olympic bears by slave labor.

When the Americans pulled out, the games flopped. Interest evaporated, ruining the propaganda potential.

But in 1979 and 1980, the Soviets, for political reasons, had been scheming to block Israeli participation in Moscow.

The method for accomplishing that involved the use of willing Third World nations in an effort to block Israel from participating in regional qualifying pre-Olympic events. Just good clean sportsmanship.

When this effort came to the surface, a committee was formed here to put pressure on the Soviets and on NBC-TV. Its goal was to reduce the politics being played in the run-up to the Moscow games. Not surprisingly, the committee ran into resistance from the U.S. Olympic Committee, which would hold the games in Hell, if necessary — but also, apparently, from the CIA, which liked the idea of those huge Moscow crowds as a cover for potential agents. Sports, you see, was uppermost in everyone's mind.

Sports were also foremost in the mind of Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, when the team from Taiwan was kicked out of the Montreal Olympics after threats from Peking.

This year, an 85-pound, 17-year-old named Zola Budd may not be able to compete in Los Angeles, despite the fact that she is the fast-

est female middle-distance runner in the world. Her problem is that she is a white South African, and South Africa is excluded. She is trying to compete for the British team, which is doubtful.

The international-class athletes I know do not feel, when they are walking onto a tennis court or stepping into a prize ring, that they are competing with a government. They think the opponent is an individual, but that's not the way it is in the Olympics.

And, of course, the communist countries have led the way in the use of steroids and other chemicals. An East German swimmer revealed recently that she will live the remainder of her life in pain because of what the sports chemists pumped into her body. To an increasing degree, Olympic success will be determined in the laboratory rather than on the field of competition.

The modern Olympics present an extremely ugly picture. Professional athletics, where cash is the only thing that matters, are pure by comparison. Professional boxing is probably the most corrupt of all the professional sports, but it's better than the Olympics.

Still, despite the hypocrisy, the steroid freaks and the hormone monsters, the political corruption, despite the fact that Dorian Gray ought to be head of the Olympic movement, I would not miss a minute of the Los Angeles games, and neither will the Soviets.